

A word from the Rector of the Jagiellonian University

A university, as the name suggests, is the sum of its students and teachers who strive together towards the acquisition of knowledge. The concept of the university has its roots in the Middle Ages and constituted universalism within the framework of the culture and notions of the times. In the Polish Commonwealth, the declaration ascribed to Moses Isserles that Poland was a paradise for Jews – *Paradis Judeorum* – was one that did not extend to access to university level education. During the period of the Enlightenment, together with the onset of modernity and changes in the way in which the world and man were perceived, universities underwent a transformation which resulted in the breaking of the restrictive bonds which had previously barred Jews from attending. During the Galician Autonomy which came into effect after 1870, creed and nationality ceased to be barriers in the acquisition of knowledge and the undertaking of scientific research; this coincided with a new development path undertaken by the Jagiellonian University. Cultivating its centuries-long tradition of religious tolerance, from the 19th century onwards the Jagiellonian University was to become an academy to which students from all over Europe and from a range of denominations were admitted. Jews, being a sizeable percentage of the inhabitants of the territories of the former Polish Commonwealth, were to become natural candidates for a university education, including studying at the Jagiellonian University. A number of them were to display outstanding talents and abilities and became part of the university's teaching and research staff. Academics of Jewish provenance were to acquire not only knowledge but also to obtain the highest university offices – including the position of university chancellor or rector. The present book recalls a series of individuals who were professors and academics at the Jagiellonian University and who helped create the foundations of Polish and world science. Many of these eminent authorities were to fall victim to the Nazi operation *Sonderaktion Krakau*, and were arrested on the 6th of November 1939, subsequently perishing in German concentration camps. The Jagiellonian University takes particular care and reverence in preserving the memory of these victims.

This book devoted to academics of Jewish origin recalls the service of these academics for Poland and Polish science as well as pointing out how

Polish culture and science during the period of the partitions of Poland was particularly attractive to the various national groups inhabiting the Polish lands, including Jews. Following the regaining of independence in 1918, Polish Jewish citizens were to contribute greatly to the strengthening of Polish statehood in every possible field.

Rector Prof. dr hab. med. Wojciech Nowak